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# Using Professional Learning Communities and Collaboration to Increase Student Achievement

Scott W. Belako

*University of Mary Washington*

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Using Professional Learning Communities and Collaboration  
to Increase Student Achievement

Scott W. Belako  
EDCI 590 Individual Research  
April 17, 2007

Rebecca S. Hayes  
Signature of Project Advisor

Dr. Rebecca Hayes  
Associate Professor of Education

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## **Abstract**

A Professional Learning Community (PLC) is a way of organizing a school environment that builds collaboration with an ultimate goal of improving student achievement. A PLC is a way of involving all stakeholders in life-long learning and focusing on a common goal of gathering and analyzing data to improve student learning. Research has proven that “traditional” methods of school leadership and teaching are stagnant. Many of education’s prominent figures are speaking out as proponents for PLCs citing their own personal successes as validation for the change.

A school community that desires to create a PLC must take the necessary steps to prepare for the journey. The school staff must agree upon a vision of where they want to go as well as create measurable and attainable goals that will help them succeed. The foundation for a successful PLC is a community of collaboration in which all stakeholders work together to improve student learning and achievement. Once a school begins the journey towards creating a PLC, stakeholders enter a cyclical process of constant re-evaluation and striving to improve upon areas of weakness.

After conducting initial research, a survey was written and distributed to local school leaders who have been instrumental in the creation of PLCs within their schools. The responses they provided echoed the sentiments of education leaders such as DuFour, Eaker, and Schmoker. With this information, a manual was created as a tool to be used by schools wishing to become collaborative PLC communities.



## **Introduction:**

Teaching elementary school for six years, I have had the opportunity to teach grades three, four, and five. In my experience with all three-grade levels, I have found that not all teachers work together and collaborate effectively. One of the biggest problems facing schools today is that schools are not using Professional Learning Communities (PLC) and collaboration to increase student achievement. My purpose for this project is to develop a plan that would implement a Professional Learning Community into a school successfully over the course of five to seven years. This plan will include the creation of a vision, mission, and a set of goals; identifying weaknesses and creating action plans for improvement; creating common assessments; and establishing a continuous process of data analysis to drive instruction. While working on the aspects of PLCs, there will also be a focus on the collaboration of all stakeholders within the process to make it successful. The rationale for this project is that PLCs have been proven to build leadership, to develop effective collaboration, and to improve communication amongst all stakeholders while driving instruction and improving student achievement.

## **Rationale**

Creating a Professional Learning Community is the key to building school-wide collaboration and creating and implementing a successful vision. In order to develop a PLC, “leaders must guide their schools by establishing a clear vision,” (Huffman, p.21, 2003). Without a vision, collaboration and PLC’s cannot exist. A PLC is a community of people who continually expand their learning and work collectively to achieve a desired result. In the case of schools, the desired result is for all stakeholders to work together to improve student achievement. Professional Learning Communities allow teachers to, “continually explore their curricular and pedagogical strategies and the influences of these efforts on student learning,” (Sup Ovitz, p.1592, 2002). Using PLC’s forces teachers to review, to reflect, and to analyze what is working and what is not. PLC’s allow teams of teachers to meet within vertical grade levels to discuss essential understandings that will help them focus on the vision of the school. PLC’s also create a culture of self-reflection and peer observations amongst colleagues. This allows staff to share areas of strength as well as strengthen areas of weakness. By creating and utilizing meaningful staff development plans, teachers can learn to use their time effectively to improve strategies for instruction. According to DuFour the shift to a PLC is a simple shift, “from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning,” (DuFour, et al. p.32, 2005). Schools that begin to function as Professional Learning Communities are aware of the commitment involved in ensuring that all students learn.

## **Collaboration and PLCs**

The biggest enemy of school improvement is isolation. Schmocker states that, “teachers do not learn best from outside experts or by attending conferences or implementing “programs”

installed by outsiders. Teachers learn best from other teachers, in settings where they literally teach each other the art of teaching,” (DuFour, et al. p.141, 2005). In schools today there is not enough collaboration occurring between administrators, teachers, students, and parents. In order to improve student performance and increase student achievement schools must create collaborative high-level professional communities. School reform research reports, “that schools with high levels of community are not only more effective but have school climates wherein teachers’ work patterns are cohesive and collaborative,” (Haycock, p.35, 2002). In order to establish these high levels of school-wide collaboration: all parties, especially the administration, must be involved. The school’s administration must have policies that include roles for all stakeholders to be involved in the collaboration effort. It is extremely important that these policies include, “clear definitions of complementary roles such as the technology specialist and teacher-librarian,” (Haycock, p.38, 2004). These expectations about collaboration should be developed by the administration through role clarification, modeling, proactive involvement, observations, and personal experiences.

If administrators want all stakeholders to collaborate they must engage in collaboration throughout each school day. For effective collaboration to occur teachers must step away from casual and general discussions. Productive collaboration is, “frequent, continuous, and increasingly concrete and precise talk about teaching practice,” (DuFour, et al. p.141, 2005). Teachers commonly discuss instruction in general terms when they chat. For collaboration to be meaningful and successful, conversations amongst teachers must be focused on student achievement and teaching practices that would lead to improvement. In Professional Learning Communities (PLC’s), collaboration focuses on achievement, teamwork, and instruction creating essential outcomes for students. With these types of goals in place, the focus of collaboration



shifts from merely talking about instruction to changing instruction to improve student performance.

For collaboration to be successful in school reform teacher leaders must be created. This is where the administration must be careful in selection of school leaders. The principal must have the, “ability to encourage and motivate leadership capacities in the building for educational school reform and collaboration,” (Birky, p.87, 2006). Collaboration works best when teacher leaders are present throughout the school. Birky asserts that, “schools that have principals that function more as managers than instructional leaders have less successful schools than those who worked closely with teachers in their roles,” (Birky, p.89, 2006) To build a community of learners, teacher leaders must effectively communicate with the principal. If the administration and teacher leaders collaborate effectively, collaboration will be observed by the rest of the stakeholders as an essential component to increase student achievement. Teacher leaders must also work to engage the administration into a collaboration initiative. Principals and teachers must work together to change their focus from teaching to a focus on learning. By doing so, “they recognize that they cannot help all students learn unless they work together collaboratively, and they constantly seek tangible evidence that students have truly acquired the intended knowledge, skills, and dispositions,” (DuFour, et al. p.2, 2005). They can learn to do this by discussing collaboration with administration, attending professional conferences, and sharing stories of student success with the administration. These are a few tactics that will continue to foster principal and teacher leader relations, as well as instill the collaboration efforts within the entire school community. As collaboration continues between administration and teacher leaders, the rest of the staff, including general education teachers, special education teachers, and specialist teachers, must also follow in order for student achievement to prosper.

It is important to realize that collaboration is not created overnight. One of the most important aspects of collaboration is the effort and amount of time it takes to build a community of learners that collaborate successfully. As Barbara Watkins states, “a proactive principal with a hands-on approach can foster and nurture such a culture that supports and validates a shared and articulated mission, vision, and core values and is focused on continuous improvement and action,” (DuFour, et al. p.193, 2005). For this to be done principals and leaders must create time to allow their staff to meet with each other to discuss student achievement and instruction. Barbra Eason-Watkins notes that, “the school leaders meet on a regular basis to examine and reflect on their professional practice by reading professional books and discussing current research in teaching, learning, and educational leadership,” (DuFour, et al. p.198, 2005). With this being said, it is more important than ever for the teachers and administrators to create time to complete these ongoing tasks. Time can be created, by using para-educators to cover classes, which would allow teachers time to collaborate during the school day. Faculty meetings may also be used as times to collaborate and share new ideas. School leaders have to develop time for a culture of collaboration to function highly within a Professional Learning Community. Similar to Watkins thinking, Michael Fullan writes that, “teachers in successful schools with professional learning communities work together on a continuing basis focused on student work [through assessment],” (DuFour, et al. p. xiii, 2005). Teachers then use collaboration time to analyze assessment results. Based upon these assessment results teachers, “change their instructional practice accordingly to get better results,” (Fullan, et al. p. xiii, 2005). For this instructional process to occur, time must be devoted and used effectively by teachers and administrators.

There are a myriad of benefits incorporated within the use of collaboration. If collaborative working environments exist, “teachers have the potential to create the collective capacity for initiating and sustaining ongoing improvement in their professional practice so each student they serve can receive the highest quality of education possible,” (Brownell, p.169, 2006). This is exactly why all schools need to build and implement an effective plan of collaboration and staff development. The only way that this can be done is by creating a culture of professional learners that are focused on the vision of the school in order to boost student achievement. Linda Darling-Hammond wrote that, “improvement is a function of continual learning groups pursuing collective . . . explicit goals for student learning,” (Darling-Hammond, p. xii, 2005). She goes on to assert that a school’s success depends on, “collaborative structures for success that maintains a press for ambitious teaching and academic achievement,” (Darling-Hammond, p. xii, 2005). With these thoughts in mind it only seems practical to create a PLC in each school community. This united function of collaboration, “improves the quality of teaching and pays big, often immediate, dividends in student learning and professional morale in virtually any setting,” by building a community of learners that drive instruction to increase student achievement (DuFour, et al. p. xii, 2005).

### Creating and Implementing a Shared Vision

It is essential for the school to develop a shared vision and purpose that is implemented by all stakeholders to focus upon improving student learning. It is said that, “without a common language, a shared vision, a set of guiding principles, and powerful intervention strategies a unified system of education is, at best, difficult,” (Weiner, p. 285, 2005). A school's visions need to be created to sustain substantive school improvement and to develop personnel to function as



a collaborative group of professional learners. In a PLC, the unifying principle that all stakeholders should embrace is that all students should learn at high levels. Everyone must buy in to the idea that collaborative efforts must not stop; rather these efforts should be aimed at the continual capturing and implementation of this concept by everyone involved. Richard DuFour states that educators must work together to clarify the following questions, “what we want all students to learn, how will we know when each student has mastered the essential learning, how will we respond when a student experiences difficulty, and how we will deepen the learning for students who have already mastered essential knowledge and skills,” (DuFour, et al. p.15, 2005). The shared vision and purpose should focus on using data to change the ways the school looks and functions by identifying and implementing ways to improve low student performance within the school. For this transformation to occur, the school community must remain focused on the central idea that all students can and will learn at high levels.

Unless collaboration is present throughout the school, the vision cannot be implemented successfully. Teaching should not be a lonely profession where one stays isolated in a classroom. Instead, a school vision along with the concept of a PLC should foster collaboration amongst all stakeholders to obtain one common goal, all students can learn at high levels. However, DuFour states that, “a PLC concept will never become the norm in schools unless educators take steps to (1) systematically embed collaboration in routine practices of the school and, just as importantly, (2) provide the structure and parameters to ensure that collaboration focuses on improving the learning of both students and adults,” (DuFour, et al. p.18, 2005). This not only targets student learning but also analyzes the importance of life-long learning for teachers.

## Staff Development for Life-long Learning

In a PLC, stakeholders emphasize the thoughts of lifelong learning. Roland Barth suggests that, “a most fundamental best practice in a professional learning community is to promote the qualities and dispositions of insatiable, lifelong learning in every member of the school community – young people and adults alike- so that when the school experience concludes, learning will not,” (DuFour, et al. p.118, 2005). With this shared purpose in mind, all members of the school community should be collaborating toward achieving a common goal. In this capacity, lifelong learning means:

- A love for learning for its own sake
- A voluntary engagement in learning activities
- The ability to ask one’s own questions and take responsibility for addressing and pursuing them
- The ability to marshal resources to address those questions: time, attention, money, tools, other people, books, technology
- The capacity to continuously reflect on oneself as a learner and on the learning
- The capacity to set one’s own high standards of learning and to assess the extent to which one is succeeding in resolving the question posed
- The capacity to know and celebrate success (DuFour, et al. p.118, 2005)

Examples of this may include a student who may not normally seek extra help staying after school for remediation, and teachers who have been stuck in the same routine begin using new teaching strategies and collaborating to improve instructional practices. For these changes to happen educational leaders have to make the shift from traditional schools to schools that incorporate and foster the ideas of a Professional Learning Community. Developing a school

vision takes time and can be challenging. Therefore, a vision must include, “significant time commitment from all staff members, outstanding leadership and facilitation skills, and a clearly focused agenda,” (Huffman, p. 25, 2003). Staff development should correlate along with the vision statement in such a way that meetings and development sessions should be planned and implemented so as to reflect the need for school improvement. Rather than utilizing staff training that lacks common purpose, provides little or no opportunity for teachers to practice implementation, or fails to provide opportunities for the trainers and teachers to develop collaborative relationships, schools must implement interactive staff development that ties into the school’s vision. By using interactive staff development, administrators should be, “employing interactive principles throughout a staff development that fosters construction of a shared purpose and initiation of collegial relationships among teachers and staff developers,” (Scanlon, p.42, 2005). This change in thinking will encourage teachers to attend staff development sessions in order to foster learning communities and strengthen student learning. By collaboratively building this culture, staff development will have a shared purpose for all teachers and staff members. This will propel overall student achievement and build a successful Professional Learning Community.

### Creating PLCs

Building a Professional Learning community creates an atmosphere that encourages teachers to work in collaborative teams consisting of grade levels, departments, and teacher specialists. Once a vision is developed these teams work collectively to identify the standards that must be taught and to develop the collaborative plan of action that correlates directly with the essential understandings that they have come to consensus upon. Lawrence Lezotte suggests



that collaborative teams should focus on what he calls the Seven Correlates of Effective Schools. They are, “instructional leadership, clear and focused mission, safe and orderly environment, climate of high expectations for success, frequent monitoring of student success, positive home-school relations, and opportunity to learn and time on task,” (DuFour, et. al. p.178-9, 2005). According to his research, which is based upon documented successes of effective schools, this framework will provide schools the ability to “identify, categorize, and solve,” their weaknesses by, “utilizing the collaborative approach to professional learning communities ... to yield a powerful and effective continuous school improvement process leading to increased student achievement for all students,” (DuFour, et al. P178-9, 2005). The school community then continuously works to focus instruction upon the vision and these standards, meeting frequently to discuss strengths and weaknesses of their instruction and student success.

Creating PLC's is an ongoing task that takes five to six years to foster within a school community. However, research indicates that schools must begin to construct a community of learners that work collaboratively on meeting the high demands of student accountability. Collectively all stakeholders must work together to accomplish this never-ending mission of improving student achievement. PLC's require teachers to collaborate and build upon the vision of the school, which “is an ongoing, never-ending, daily challenge confronting all who hope to create learning communities,” (Huffman, p.22. 2003). These communities of learners focus upon strengthening teachers' strengths, and weakening teachers' weaknesses by having teachers instruct collaboratively which proves to be much stronger than teaching individually. With this said, the question to be asked is: Do professional learning communities have a place in schools? The data say yes!

## **Methodology**

For this project I will use the experiences that I have had being part of the school leadership team and while observing strengths and weaknesses of the beginning of a PLC plan during implementation. I have also consulted the writings of such notables as the DuFours, Eaker, and Schmocker. After conducting research on the rationale for instituting PLCs, I devised a survey that was sent to school leaders who have been instrumental in the creating and implementing of school-based PLCs. Through this survey, I hoped to gain additional insight into what it was like attempting to create a PLC – both the positive and negative experiences. Attendance at the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual William and Mary Leadership Academy, along with the research, contributed to the foundation for the manual on implementing a PLC. This manual includes a brief overview of what a PLC is, why they are successful, and how they should be implemented. I have included a timeline spanning several years within which to gradually introduce and implement a Professional Learning Community which focuses on total collaboration within a school community.

## **Interviews**

In the hopes of gathering additional data on PLCs and collaboration from local sources, an interview was written and distributed to several school leaders. Responses were received from three individuals – two at the middle school level and one at the elementary level. Of those interviewed, two currently work at schools that have had an active PLC for three years the third individual is in the midst of creating a PLC at her school.

## PLCs

When asked what a PLC is the responses centered around the ideas of collaborative environments within which all stakeholders share a common vision of using data to increase achievement and learning while holding each other accountable. According to the respondents, the benefits of PLCs include a central focus on student learning, positive improvements in school climate, stakeholders taking more ownership within the learning process, and an increased sense of support throughout the school. Only one of the respondents stated that actual student achievement on state standardized tests was the reason for implementing PLCs within a school. The other respondents stated that the reason they decided to implement PLCs was because they heard the DuFour's speak of the benefits of PLCs and the potential for increased student achievement and overall collaboration.

From their descriptions, it appears that all three respondents work within PLCs that resemble each other. All of the respondents highlighted the following facts about what their PLCs look like: 1) there are collaborative teams, 2) there is an emphasis on remediation, 3) there are common assessments, and 4) there are agreed upon essential outcomes for all stakeholders to focus upon. The three respondents also shared similar hopes for their respective PLCs. Common themes included a common vision for the entire school staff, a collaborative culture, and increased learning for both students and teachers. After highlighting their hopes for their PLCs, the respondents commented on the improvements they have seen thus far. Everyone mentioned the use of common assessments to improve remediation efforts to help struggling learners. Wanting to know what suggestions and recommendations they would have for schools interested in implementing PLCs, the respondents were asked what advice they could offer based upon their experiences to date. Unanimously, the respondents stated that schools wishing to



implement PLCs need to educate all stakeholders, involve all stakeholders in the entire process, and stay abreast of current research.

### Collaboration

Knowing the importance of collaboration within a PLC, the respondents were asked to describe what collaboration means at their schools. Again, it was interesting to learn that all three respondents shared similar definitions of collaboration. The ideas of focusing on common goals, working together in a structured environment, open communication, accountability, and consistent expectations for learning were the main ideas that prevailed in all three interviews. Each respondent agreed that collaboration is the number one, most important ingredient to a successful PLC. Within their collaborative environments the two most prominent ways that teachers have demonstrated their collaborative efforts have been through the implementation of common planning and the creation of common assessments. Although each respondent had positive remarks about collaboration, they also mentioned that there are some barriers to creating a collaborative environment that could sustain a PLC. Some of the most apparent barriers included getting all stakeholders to buy into the idea of creating a PLC, educating all stakeholders so that everyone understood PLCs, maintaining high morale during the learning curve, and finding time to create assessments, study data, and remediate students.

Although each school environment did face initial challenges when attempting to create a collaborative environment that would sustain a PLC, they have been successful thus far in educating all stakeholders about the benefits of such a transition upon student learning and the entire school culture.

## **Recommendations**

After researching PLCs and interviewing administrators who have implemented successful PLCs within their schools, I make the following recommendations for any school endeavoring to begin this journey.

- 1) The main goal for a PLC needs to be focused upon improving student achievement. A vision must be created along with measurable goals that will use data that will sustain this ultimate goal.
- 2) Time and resources must be utilized in order to appropriately educate all stakeholders on the process of creating a PLC.
- 3) Collaboration must be at the heart of the PLC environment. All stakeholders need to buy in to the idea that this new way of thinking and teaching will ultimately benefit students.
- 4) A list of resources should be made available to all stakeholders as a way to educate themselves and answer questions.
- 5) Teams of teachers need to be created – by department, grade level, etc. Within these collaborative teams, essential outcomes for all students must be agreed upon.
- 6) A master schedule needs to be created that will allow collaborative teams to meet together on a weekly basis so that they can discuss student progress and analyze data.
- 7) Once student data has been analyzed, the collaborative teams need to: 1) devise ways to remediate students who are having difficulty mastering the content material, and 2) create enrichment activities for those students who are successfully mastering the concepts.
- 8) From here, the teams need to be continually monitoring student progress and achievement in order to find ways to help struggling learners.

- 9) Professional development should be centered on the school vision and corresponding goals. Administration should seek teacher input for areas of weakness that they would like assistance with. Research based best teaching practices should be utilized for teacher improvement. Ultimately these efforts should build coherently from one year to the next.
- 10) All stakeholders should be involved in a yearly review of the vision and goals for relevance and accuracy. If needed, the vision and goals should be adjusted to accurately focus upon school and student needs.

With these goals in mind, the following manual and sample master schedule could be used by a school that wishes to implement a PLC. This endeavor will prove to be challenging yet rewarding with the ultimate success of the students.



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#### Conferences

10<sup>th</sup> Annual William and Mary National Leadership Academy, School Leadership Institute.  
Williamsburg, VA, June 25-27, 2006.

## **Appendices**



# So, You Want to Be A PLC School?

## A Manual for Creating PLCs

### I. Introduction

- ✓ What is a PLC?
- ✓ Why PLCs?
- ✓ Who has PLCs?
- ✓ What does a PLC look like?

### II. Becoming a PLC School

- ✓ Getting Started
- ✓ Creating a Vision
- ✓ Creating Meaningful Goals
- ✓ Data, data, data
- ✓ Self-Evaluating
- ✓ The On-going Cycle
- ✓ Things to Remember

### III. The Plan

### IV. Resources

# **Introduction**

**What is a PLC?** A PLC is a Professional Learning Community which creates a new environment that builds collaboration with an ultimate goal of improving student achievement.

**Why PLCs?** Research has proven that "traditional" methods of school leadership and teaching are stagnant. A PLC is a common sense approach involving all stakeholders in life-long learning and focusing on a common goal of gathering and analyzing data to improve student learning

**Who has PLCs?** Schools that are attempting to find new ways to bring all stakeholders together for the overall improvement of student achievement and learning.

**What does a PLC look like?**

- 1) Everyone working together towards a common goal.
- 2) Student Learning is the Number One priority.
- 3) Collaboration, collaboration, collaboration

# Becoming a PLC School

## Getting Started

- Be Prepared - EVERYONE needs to be educated on the benefits of a PLC - see the Resource list for books, articles, and websites that will prove to be valuable tools
- Educate - plan to send several teacher leaders to summer conferences on PLCs so they can become knowledgeable. You can use these individuals as team leaders to help launch the collaborative efforts.
- Be ready to make changes to the 'old way' of doing things - including making the master schedule,
- Expect resistance - remain calm, stay positive, and give your stakeholders time. Let them ask questions and share your wealth of knowledge with them
- Forge ahead - though you may find resistance move ahead with those on board to create a PLC

## Creating a Vision

- Everyone needs to be on the same page - Your school needs a Vision. As a leader, you need to make a decision about the best way to create your vision.
  - You could nominate a small group of teachers to help you create a vision
  - You could elicit feedback from the entire faculty
  - You could create it yourself with teacher/community input
- Just remember - you have to get everyone to buy into the new idea. ALL stakeholders should feel that they are an important player in the process.



## Creating Meaningful Goals

- Once you have your Vision - and all stakeholders know where you are going - you need to set goals for yourselves.
- Don't over do it - start small and work your way up.
- Make sure your goals are specific, realistic, and measurable.
- Remember: The goals of a PLC is to build collaboration and improve student achievement in areas of need

## Data, data, data

- Once your goals are set, you will need to collect data to evaluate your overall successes and your areas of weaknesses.
- Ways to collect data - common assessments, sub-group data, standardizes tests, etc.

## Self-Evaluating

- Don't Forget - No one is Perfect - we can all improve somewhere, don't be shy about pointing out areas that can be improved.
- Step back and take a look at how you did compared to how you wanted to do.
- Re-evaluate your goals -
  - Did you meet them? Or did you fall short?
  - Should you re-write them? Add to them? Or write new goals???

## The on-going cycle

- This is an On-going cycle - it NEVER ends.
- Each year, your school needs to re-evaluate the Vision and Goals to make sure they are still relevant.
- Gather and Analyze data to make sure students are learning and their achievement is increasing



## Things to Remember

- Be Patient!!! Rome was not built in a Day - this will take time.
- Be a Sponge - soak up as much information and research as you can about PLCs.
- Be flexible
- Be open to the opinions and ideas of your Stakeholders, there is not a one-size-fits-all method to PLCs, you need to figure out what works best for your school and the needs of your school, your students, and your stakeholders.

# The Plan

Collaboration will be phased in over the course of a year. This professional development plan will be a year-long process to gradually introduce teachers to collaboration, how it works, and why it needs to become a part of the school's culture. The idea behind the gradualness is that it will offer teachers the time to become accustomed to the new ideas and to practice over a period of time.

## Year One

- Step 1      Master Schedule will be created with common planning and lunches signed by grade level/department to allow time during the school day for teachers to meet and collaborate. Remediation times will also be built into the school day to offer additional instructional assistance and support for students.
  
- Step 2      Administration and Leadership Team consisting of Principal, Assistant Principals, Grade Level Chairs, and others as deemed necessary will come together and review this plan for implementation. They will serve as the facilitators.
  
- Step 3      Introductory Meeting during teacher work week - entire faculty will be brought together for a 30 minute meeting. The meeting will begin with a brainstorming activity in which teachers will come up with their ideas of what collaboration means. After sharing, administrators will introduce the idea of collaboration as the professional development focus for the entire school year. Data will be used to emphasize the impact collaboration has on instruction and student success.
  
- Step 4      First follow-up Meeting - will be by grade level/department - each teacher will complete a questionnaire entitled "Collaboration & Me". The grade level/department chairs and assigned administrators will facilitate the meeting. This will serve as the starting point for why and how teachers work together. Small groups will work together on team building activities. After the activity, the group will discuss how they worked together and the benefits of collaboration.

The "homework" will be to work on deciphering the assigned state standards for the first grading period and agree upon meanings. The group will reconvene in two days.

- Step 5      Second Small Meeting - will be by grade level/department - the teachers will come back and discuss their conversations about state standards. If there were noted differences in how they were interpreted - this needs to be discussed and used as an example as to why collaboration is important. This meeting will be used to layout the new procedures for the school year including:
- collaboration by grade level/subject at least 1 time per week
  - teachers will need to collaborate for lesson plans, tests, quizzes, etc.
  - classes will use same tests, quizzes to evaluate student learning and results must be turned in to assigned administrator.
  - each meeting will use a specific reporting form which will be turned in to assigned administrator for review
  - observations and evaluations will include collaboration piece
- Step 6      Monthly Faculty Meetings - Each faculty member will be issued a copy of the book Professional Learning Communities at Work by DuFour and Eaker. Cross grade level and cross curricular study groups will be formed. There will be reading assignments each month and the groups will meet to discuss them. At the monthly faculty meeting, time will be devoted for the administrators to summarize findings, mention key points, and give suggestions for collaboration.
- Step 7      Monthly Grade Level/Department Meetings - department chairs will check in on the progress of collaborative efforts and offer help and support. The departments will use the meeting hand-out forms and will turn them in to the assigned administrator.
- Step 8      Quarterly Meetings for cross grade level and cross curricular collaboration. These meetings will give teachers with in different grade levels and departments the ability to collaborate and find ways to work together for improved student performance.



- Step 9 Fall In-service day will be designated for data analysis training. Teachers will be instructed on how to accurately collect student data for analysis. There will be a large meeting and smaller group meetings by grade level/department. Specific examples will be given to demonstrate how to do this. Teachers will be asked to come to the in-service day with a class set of student assessments that had been graded. Teachers will then have time to practice the analysis tactics. The teachers will be instructed to practice the tactics and that they will be discussed at meetings. The teachers will also be informed that they will be required to use these tactics for data analysis at the semester/mid-terms.
- Step 10 After the semester/mid-term exams, teachers will meet by grade level/department to discuss findings and share ideas for improving student achievement. The departments will use the meeting hand-out forms and will turn them in to the assigned administrator.
- Step 11 At the end of the year, possibly as part of the summative evaluation process, each teacher will be asked to reflect upon the year and the following issues:
- their opinions on collaboration - did it work?
  - Benefits of collaboration & positive feedback
  - Anything they would like to see improved upon
  - How they have used collaboration to improve student achievement
  - Their ideas for continuing with collaboration
- Step 12 Teachers will also create Professional Growth Plans for the following year explaining how they plan to continue to build upon collaboration. These plans will become part of their personnel files and will be used in observations and evaluations.



## Years Two thru Five

- Each school year will continue with a similar plan in place.
- At the end of each year, the vision and goals will be evaluated and revised if needed in preparation for the upcoming school year.
- Professional Development will remain aligned with the overall PLC goal of improving student achievement.
- Continue to stay up-to-date on current trends within the PLC community.
- Complete quarterly surveys to ascertain teacher feedback on progress. Minor changes may be required depending upon survey results.
- Continue to develop and utilize common assessments to evaluate student progress and teacher effectiveness.
- Monitor common planning meetings between collaborative teams and cross-grade level teams - including special teachers.
- Maintain open lines of communication with all stakeholders.

# **Resources**

## **BOOKS & ARTICLES**

**Birky, Virginia, Marc Shelton, and Scot Headley. "An Administrator's Challenge: Encouraging Teachers to Be Leaders," *NASSP Bulletin*, Volume 90, Number 2, June 2006, pp.87-101.**

This article focused on how teacher leaders are an important asset to help lead school reform. In order for teachers to want to be leaders it is essential for the principal to collaborate closely with school leaders and allow them to share in the decision making process.

**Brownell, Mary, Alyson Adams, Paul Sindelar, Nancy Waldron, and Stephanie Vanhover. "Learning From Collaboration: The Role of Teacher Qualities," *Exceptional Children*, Volume 72, Number 2, Winter 2006, pp.169-185.**

This article examines how teacher collaboration can be useful to some teachers and not to others. The article did a study of eight teachers at the elementary school level for two years. The teachers were given professional development training on how to collaborate and how to adopt teaching strategies between general education and special education teachers. The study showed that a teacher had to be able to adopt at all times in order for collaboration to be successful. If the teacher did not find it useful, they were less likely to collaborate well which resulted in less effective teaching. The article did not mention anything regarding the impact of collaboration on student achievement.

**Dearman, Carla and Sheila Alber. "The changing face of education: Teachers cope with challenges through collaboration and reflective study," *The Reading Teacher*, Volume 58, Number 7, April 2005, pp.634-640.**

This article talks about the true importance of accountability and what is necessary to change the way students are taught. The article discusses the importance of a shared vision, restructuring professional development to provide time for collaboration, and finding time to allow for reflective conversations.

**Dufour, Richard, Rebecca DuFour, and Robert Eaker, Ed. *On Common Ground: The power of professional learning communities*. Indiana: Solution Tree, 2005.**

This book is a conglomeration of chapters written by a dozen educators on the reasons for creating a PLC, the benefits of PLCs, and the challenges that may stand in the way of becoming a successful PLC. The chapters offer real-life examples of how these educators created PLCs within their schools and some of their experiences.

**DuFour, Richard, and Robert Eaker. *Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best practices for enhancing student achievement*. Indiana: National Educational Service, 1998.**

This book lays out ways in which schools can go about creating a successful PLC. It includes such topics of discussion on teacher preparation, professional development, stakeholder involvement, and using assessments to guide and monitor instruction. The benefits of this book is that it has up-to-date research, practical applications, and examples for the readers.

**DuFour, Richard, Rebecca DuFour, Robert Eaker, and Gayle Karhanek. *Whatever It Takes: How professional learning communities respond when kids don't learn*. Indiana: Solution Tree, 2004.**

This book suggests ways in which schools can provide struggling learners with interventions and support during the school day.

**DuFour, Richard, Rebecca DuFour, Robert Eaker, and Thomas Many. *Learning By Doing: A handbook for professional learning communities at work*. Indiana: Solution Tree, 2006.**

This book discusses building capacity for becoming a PLC. It includes answers to the following PLC questions – Why? and How? Experts provide rationale as to why a PLC should be created and it how it can be accomplished. Once a PLC has been created, the book also provides ways in which a PLC can be assessed and offers tips for continually moving forward. This book contains reproducible worksheets and surveys that will prove to be helpful in the journey to creating a PLC.

**Eaker, Robert, Richard DuFour, and Rebecca DuFour. *Getting Started: Reculturing schools to become professional learning communities*. Indiana: Solution Tree, 2002.**

This book discusses ways in which leaders can begin to initiate a PLC within a school setting. The two questions this book addresses are where and how to begin.

**Haycock, Ken. "Building Collaborative Learning Communities," *What Works*, April 2002, p.35.**

Schools that have PLCs in place not only are more effective, but have climates in which teachers work patterns are cohesive and collaborative. Schools need to do a better job of making use of librarians to build literacy within schools. Leaders need to break the barriers between teachers and librarians and create more positive perceptions.



**Haycock, Ken. "Collaboration among School Specialists," *Teacher Librarian*, Volume 33, Number 4, April 2006, p.38.**

Teachers collaborate with each other but do not collaborate enough or at all with specialists. Teachers need to collaborate more with special teachers in order to increase student achievement in literacy. Administrators and school districts need to provide more time for collaboration and need to enforce or mandate this collaboration.

**Huffman, Jane. "The Role of Shared Values and Vision in Creating Professional Learning Communities," *NASSP Bulletin*, Volume 87, Number 637, December 2003, pp.21-34.**

It is essential to create a shared vision within each school community. This vision should incorporate all stakeholders and be carried out by all parties involved. The vision is an essential component to any PLC. In order for this to happen the leader must involve all stakeholders and provide the resources and time needed to create a vision that will be carried out by all. This will ensure that everyone has a clearly stated purpose and takes responsibility for student learning.

**Rea, Patricia. "Engage Your Administrator in Your Collaborative Initiative," *Intervention in School and Clinic*, Volume 40, Number 5, May 2005, pp.312-316.**

This article deals with twenty ways in which administrators should be involved in collaborative teams.

**Scanlon, David, Margaret Gallego, Grace Zamora Duran, & Elba Reyes. "Interactive Staff Development Supports Collaboration When Learning to Teach," *Teacher Education and Special Education*, Volume 28, Number 1, Winter 2005, pp.40-51.**

This article discusses the different approaches to staff development. It focuses on a need to change tradition staff development from a training model to a more interactive model where teachers have the ability to collaborate and engage in practice, reflection, and experimentation with new teaching strategies.



**Supovitz, Jonathan. "Developing Communities of Instructional Practice,"**  
*Teachers College Record*, Volume 104, Number 8, December 2002, pp.1591-1626.

This article focuses on developing communities of instructional practice. The article focuses in on a school reform in Cincinnati, OH and how a school district mandated team-based schooling. The teachers liked that they got to work with each other and it boosted morale. However, not much was mentioned regarding the improvement of student achievement. The district did not use the approach carefully enough and wasted a lot of time and effort by not focusing on student achievement.

**Weiner, Ivor and Wendy Murawski. "Schools Attuned: A Model for Collaborative Intervention,"** *Intervention in School and Clinic*, Volume 40, Number 5, May 2005, pp.284-290.

This article focuses on the "School Attuned" approach to create total collaboration between special education and general education teachers. The article discusses the approach of limiting students in the special education program and collaborating more to intervene as much as possible before recommending students for special education services. Collaboration is a must in order for this to occur.

**Wilhelm, Terry. "Professional Learning Communities for schools in sanctions,"**  
*Leadership*, Volume 36, Number 1, September/October 2006, pp.28-30, 32-33.

Professional Learning Communities can be implemented successfully in schools where sanctions are present. Teachers need to collaborate in order to build understanding of the standards and develop essential understandings. These schools in California have placed PLCs within their schools and it is paying off by improving test scores and student achievement.

## **WEBSITE**

All Things PLCS - [www.allthingsplc.info](http://www.allthingsplc.info)

# Developing norms

WHEN ESTABLISHING NORMS, CONSIDER:	PROPOSED NORM
<b>TIME</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When do we meet?</li> <li>• Will we set a beginning and ending time?</li> <li>• Will we start and end on time?</li> </ul>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<b>LISTENING</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will we encourage listening?</li> <li>• How will we discourage interrupting?</li> </ul>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<b>CONFIDENTIALITY</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will the meetings be open?</li> <li>• Will what we say in the meeting be held in confidence?</li> <li>• What can be said after the meeting?</li> </ul>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<b>DECISION MAKING</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will we make decisions?</li> <li>• Are we an advisory or a decision-making body?</li> <li>• Will we reach decisions by consensus?</li> <li>• How will we deal with conflicts?</li> </ul>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<b>PARTICIPATION</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will we encourage everyone's participation?</li> <li>• Will we have an attendance policy?</li> </ul>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<b>EXPECTATIONS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do we expect from members?</li> <li>• Are there requirements for participation?</li> </ul>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>



## Critical Issues for Team Consideration

Team Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Team Members: \_\_\_\_\_

*Use the scale below to indicate the extent to which each of the following statements is true of your team.*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not True of Our Team			Our Team Is Addressing				True of Our Team		

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>1. ___ We have identified team norms and protocols to guide us in working together.</p> <p>2. ___ We have analyzed student achievement data and have established SMART goals that we are working interdependently to achieve.</p> <p>3. ___ Each member of our team is clear on the essential learnings of our course in general as well as the essential learnings of each unit.</p> <p>4. ___ We have aligned the essential learnings with state and district standards and the high-stakes exams required of our students.</p> <p>5. ___ We have identified course content and/or topics that can be eliminated so we can devote more time to essential curriculum.</p> <p>6. ___ We have agreed on how to best sequence the content of the course and have established pacing guides to help students achieve the intended essential learnings.</p> <p>7. ___ We have identified the prerequisite knowledge and skills students need in order to master the essential learnings of our course and each unit of this course.</p> <p>8. ___ We have identified strategies and created instruments to assess whether students have the prerequisite knowledge and skills.</p> <p>9. ___ We have developed strategies and systems to assist students in acquiring prerequisite knowledge and skills when they are lacking in those areas.</p> <p>10. ___ We have developed frequent common formative assessments that help us to determine each student's mastery of essential learnings.</p> | <p>11. ___ We have established the proficiency standard we want each student to achieve on each skill and concept examined with our common assessments.</p> <p>12. ___ We have developed common summative assessments that help us assess the strengths and weaknesses of our program.</p> <p>13. ___ We have established the proficiency standard we want each student to achieve on each skill and concept examined with our summative assessments.</p> <p>14. ___ We have agreed on the criteria we will use in judging the quality of student work related to the essential learnings of our course, and we practice applying those criteria to ensure consistency.</p> <p>15. ___ We have taught students the criteria we will use in judging the quality of their work and have provided them with examples.</p> <p>16. ___ We evaluate our adherence to and the effectiveness of our team norms at least twice each year.</p> <p>17. ___ We use the results of our common assessments to assist each other in building on strengths and addressing weaknesses as part of a process of continuous improvement designed to help students achieve at higher levels.</p> <p>18. ___ We use the results of our common assessments to identify students who need additional time and support to master essential learnings, and we work within the systems and processes of the school to ensure they receive that support.</p> |
|--|--|



Tea	Special Time	MON	TUES.	WED	THURS	FRI	LUNCH	IE
K1	1:00-1:45	PE	A	M	L	8:30-9:55 PE	11:26-12:06	
K2	1:00-1:45	PE	L	A	M	8:30-9:55 PE	11:29-12:09	
K3	1:00-1:45	M	PE	PE	A	8:30-9:55 L	11:32-12:02	
K4	1:00-1:45	A	PE	L	PE	8:30-9:55 M	11:35-12:05	
1-1	12:10-12:55	A	8:30-9:55 PE	M	PE	L	11:12-11:42	1:50-2:30
1-2	12:10-12:55	L	8:30-9:55 PE	A	PE	M	11:15-11:45	1:50-2:30
1-3	12:10-12:55	PE	8:30-9:55 L	PE	M	A	11:18-11:48	1:50-2:30
1-4	12:10-12:55	PE	8:30-9:55 M	L	A	PE	11:21-11:51	1:50-2:30
2-1	1:50-2:35	8:30-9:55 PE	L	PE	M	A	11:40-12:10	10:40-11:20
2-2	1:50-2:35	8:30-9:55 PE	PE	A	L	M	11:43-12:13	10:40-11:20
2-3	1:50-2:35	8:30-9:55 A	PE	M	PE	L	11:46-12:16	10:40-11:20
2-4	1:50-2:35	8:30-9:55 M	A	L	PE	PE	11:49-12:19	10:40-11:20
3-1	10:50-11:35	A	PE	L	8:30-9:55 PE	M	11:54-12:24	1:10-1:50
3-2	10:50-11:35	M	PE	A	8:30-9:55 PE	L	11:57-12:27	1:10-1:50
3-3	10:50-11:35	PE	M	PE	8:30-9:55 L	A	12:00-12:30	1:10-1:50
3-4	10:50-11:35	PE	L	M	8:30-9:55 A	PE	12:03-12:33	1:10-1:50
4-1	10:00-10:45	L	M	8:30-9:55 PE	A	PE	10:55-11:25	2:30-3:10
4-2	10:00-10:45	A	L	8:30-9:55 PE	PE	M	10:58-11:28	2:30-3:10
4-3	10:00-10:45	PE	PE	8:30-9:55 L	M	A	11:01-11:31	2:30-3:10
4-4	10:00-10:45	PE	A	8:30-9:55 M	L	PE	11:04-11:34	2:30-3:10
4-5	10:00-10:45	M	PE	8:30-9:55 A	PE	L	11:07-11:37	2:30-3:10
5-1	2:40-3:25	PE	2:40-4:00 PE	M	A	L	12:08-12:38	10:00-10:40
5-2	2:40-3:25	PE	2:40-4:00 PE	L	M	A	12:11-12:41	10:00-10:40
5-3	2:40-3:25	A	2:40-4:00 L	PE	PE	M	12:14-12:44	10:00-10:40
5-4	2:40-3:25	L	2:40-4:00 M	A	PE	PE	12:17-12:47	10:00-10:40



## TEACHER SURVEY

School:

Grade/Subject(s) Taught:  
Years Experience:

Consider the statements below that focus on curriculum, instruction, assessment, collaboration and student achievement. Indicate to what degree these statements represent a greater occurrence than in the past as a result of the new collaborative scheduling format that has been piloted this year.

Less than past years	About same as past years	More than past years
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1. My lessons include activities that differentiate instruction based on the needs of students.
2. My lessons require pair-share, group work, or similar active student learning methods.
3. My lessons require students to do quality work, meet high standards, and revise their work to improve its quality.
4. Teachers require students to evaluate their own work using, for example, rubrics, and/or scoring guides.
5. Teachers meet to evaluate student work collaboratively and discuss whether it meets standards.
6. Teachers collaboratively develop assessments that are aligned to the SOLs, and use results to discuss ways to modify or adjust instruction in an effort to help students meet standards.
7. Teachers use results of standardized testing to modify or adjust instruction to improve learning.
8. Teachers are reaching consensus on the essential standards for specific subjects and these are taught consistently from classroom to classroom.
9. Curriculum and learning materials are consistent among classrooms in the same grade levels.
10. Teachers are spending several hours each week working in teacher teams/groups to improve learning.
11. Teachers are continually learning and trying new ideas based on what they are learning in teacher teams/groups.
12. Teachers are sharing student achievement data in teacher teams/groups to determine the effectiveness of teaching strategies.
13. Teachers take responsibility for student achievement and school improvement.
14. Within my school, there is a sense of collaboration and cooperation built on trust.
15. Students are achieving at high levels.